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ABSTRACT

An assistant superintendent describes the background and economic advantages of a continuous school year plan in which students attend school for 45 class days and vacation for 15 days. Students are divided into four rotating shifts -- three groups are in class while the fourth group is on vacation. (MLF)

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YEAR-ROUND SCHOOL
THE VALLEY VIEW 45-15 PLAN

BY
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It is no secret that the term Year-Round School has appeared in educational publications for the last 100 years. But just what exactly is year-round school? Before the turn of the century, school systems in Chicago, New York and other large metropolitan areas operated their schools in excess of forty weeks a year. At the same time, our rural sections of the country were operating their one room facilities in some cases, seven months a year. Somewhere along the time spectrum, these two extremes merged to form what is more commonly called a traditional school year or the nine-month school term.

Various attempts were made during the 1930's to re-structure the school calendar. Today the school districts who operated on either a voluntary or a compulsory year round school program in the 30's are now operating a traditional nine-month program with educational opportunities for summer enrichment.

Research has led us to believe that the two main reasons why compulsory year-round school programs failed in the past were administrative inability to handle the complicated scheduling programs and public non-support for calendar revision.

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Today, October 28, 1971, the computer age is here. The scheduling procedures which out of necessity were tried by hand in the 1930's have now been automated and rapid, accurate facts are readily available.

The taxpayers are crying for accountability in education. They are also questioning what George Jensen, Chairman, of the National School Calendar Study Committee refers to as "The Fantastic Coffee-break", or three months summer vacation. This does not mean to say that parents and other taxpayers are ready to endorse year-round school programs without being actively involved in the planning and development of such programs.

To date the success of the Valley View 45-15 Continuous School Year Plan must be credited to the acceptance that the Valley View Community has given to it during the past 15 months.

Again, what is a year-round school program? It is a voluntary four-quarter plan as you will find in Atlanta, Georgia? Is it a "<u>voluntary compulsory</u>" program as you will find in Hayward, California? Is it a voluntary summer school plus a mandatory nine-month program as you will find in Chicago, or, is it the compulsory Valley View Plan that you will find in Romeovilleand Bolingbrook, Illinois. The answer to these questions is YES. These are all year-round school programs.

I would like to share with you now over 3 1/2 years of experiences pertaining to the conception, the pre-natal care, the birth and the rearing of what Mr. Robert Beckwith, Chairman of the Education Department of the Illinois State Chamber of Commerce has called "A New Chapter In The History of American Education, The Valley View 45-15 Plan".

During the 1967-68 school year, Valley View District #96 realized that in September, 1970 we would have to begin a kindergarten program by state mandate. From 1967 and up to 1970 Valley View School District was composed of grades 1-8. In addition to the additional 1200 kindergarten pupils, District #96's history has shown that its normal growth averages 500 to 600 students a year.

But in taking a look at September of 1970, what was our district to do when we were going to have over 7,000 pupils and would have room for only 5,500 pupils, and at the same time we would be out of funds to build more classrooms? One logical answer: Go on half-day sessions. A not so logical solution was to put 50, 60, maybe 70 in a classroom.

But instead, Valley View District began looking at "The Fantastic Coffeebreak" and to begin doing research on a plan to do away with the three month summer vacation when the buildings stand idle and began thinking in terms of sending kids to school all year long on a rotating shift base.

On June 30, 1970, Valley View District #96, located thirty miles Southwest of the Chicago Loop, launched what we call the "Valley View 45-15 Continuous School Year Plan." The plan is suprisingly simple and to date, has run very smoothly without serious objections from either the parents, teachers, or the pupils.

Valley View coined the phrase "45-15" which forms the heart of the plan. Every youngster goes to school for 45 class days then has a 15 class day vacation; that's all year long but on rotating shifts. The children are divided into four groups A, B, C, and D. The entire school

district, which encompasses 41 1/2 square miles, currently has an enrollment in grades K-8 of over 7,500 pupils. The 45-15 Plan schedules three of the groups to be in class while the fourth is on vacation. Thus, about three-fourths of the pupils attend school without overtaxing the facilities and another fourth stays home.

District 96 started the program on June 30, 1970 by sending Group A to class. Fifteen class days later Group B started. After another 15 class days Group C started. By the time the next 15 day period ended, it was August 31st. An so Group A then went on vacation and Group D took it's place. After another 15 days Group B went home for vacation, and Group A started up again. And so, it has gone for over a year and five months. Weekends, holidays, and a week at Christmas, a week at Easter, and a week and one-half in the summer, are enjoyed by all students as extra vacation times.

At the end of our first calendar year, every pupil had received 180 days of education or four 45-day sessions, as required by Illinois Law. He also received a total of three months vacation, plus holidays just as he used to during the long lazy summer. All children from the same family are put into the same group, so that they can always be on vacation together. Neighborhoods are kept in one group so that friends and playmates can share their free time.

All that Valley View has done is to change the school calendar or basically change 200 years of educational tradition. Really though, the three months summer vacation is a hold over from the days of agriculture when the kids had to have the summers off so that they could help on

the farms. We all know that's no longer necessary.

Valley View's problem was that of any typical suburb. Our population exploded. In 1953 we had five one-room country schools with a total enrollment of 89. Ten years later, in 1963 we had 2,400 pupils and today we have over 7,500. In the years past, after 1953, our district had changed from a rural community to a beehive of twenty-two subdivisions composed of mostly middle class workers.

As our district grew the residents approved nineteen various bond issues and tax rate increases. Four years ago, our district reached its legal bonding limit, and we began searching for alternative money and construction. Today, we can say that we have found it in the Valley View Plan, a plan formulated by the entire school district.

Instantly, upon the adoption of our 45-15 Plan, Valley View gained one-third more in building construction without laying the first brick. This is the equivalent of a six million dollar tax avoidance.

Since then the voters have approved borrowing additional money from the Illinois School Building Commission and have realized an additional one and one-half million dollar tax avoidance. So to date the district has realized a seven and a half million dollar tax avoidance in building construction.

We believe that other economies came with the 45-15 Plan. There is no interest to be paid on bond issues for the construction. No principal or staff had to be hired for the school buildings. There were no extra janitors or office clerks needed for these additional facilities.

There was no depreciation of the new buildings, no new grass to cut, no more desks to buy, or libraries to equip. Right now, Valley View needs only three-fourths the number of buses that we would have needed and three-fourths as many textbooks, microscopes, tape recorders, and other devices which our classrooms have.

The fact that the plan was new and broke with tradition was the principal hurdle which our district faced in inaugurating it.

Family vacations will be destroyed if the kids have to go to school in the summer. Well this is nonsense. How many people take a three month vacation? Every child under our 45-15 Plan will get three weeks off in the summer and will also know a year in advance what these weeks will be. He will also get three weeks off in the other seasons of the year. Now a lot of the men who live in our district work in the construction trades and have never been able to take a vacation in the summer. Now they can go away with their families at other times in the year.

But what about kids? They just won't adjust to such a plan. They need the summer off. Well, now really, that's a complete myth. We asked our counselors in our schools to keep a careful watch for any new problems with pupils, and they didn't find any. Only two children complained to a counselor about going to the school in the summer. Right now, we believe that the 45-15 Plan is better for pupils because they don't forget as much during the three week vacation as they used to in three months. Also, a student who has trouble learning need not fail for an entire year.

But what about the fact that teachers don't want to work all summer? But on the other hand they like the extra money they can earn teaching all year, especially the men who are supporting a family and who usually worked all summer in construction or some other field. That doesn't mean to say that every teacher has to work a full year, due to the fact that Illinois law prohibits it. But to date, 67% of our staff members are working more than the traditional 180 day calendar. At District 96 a teacher may choose to work either a traditional nine month or a full year. A new teacher fresh out of college receives $7,750 for nine months or $10,334.40 for a twelve month contract. Experienced teachers in the district can earn as much as $17,848.80.

And what about the fact that students won't be able to get a summer job? Well, because District #96 is an elementary district, very few of our boys and girls work in the summer. But the Illinois State Chamber of Commerce which has endorsed our 45-15 Plan has urged business to schedule vacations to co-operate with it and has said that if a high school adopted the plan, the students would have a better employment opportunity when they would be out of school. For example, high school students would be free to work when college students would not, thus reducing the competition for jobs.

But we must keep in mind that teachers need summer for graduate work. We've got four universities within easy driving distance to our district, and there are many opportunities to take graduate courses on Saturdays and in the evenings.

To date we've had some parental objections from those families who have moved into the district in mid-summer and found that their children had to start school immediately. Some of them have been pretty angry but really not at us. The person they blamed was the real estate man who didn't tell them about our year-round school program.

Further comments will cover:

1. Evaluation of the program

2. Fiscal projections

3. Curriculum considerations

4. Community public relations

5. 45-15 in the high school